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NO. 54.

THE MIGRATORY QUAIL.

An Antidote for Grasshoppers and a Fine Food and Hunting Bird.

We append to this several communications on the migratory quail, among them one from Col. F. G. Skinner, whose communication on the subject in our issue of April 26th has received much favorable comment from our readers, and we are pleased to see has been very extensively copied in the columns of our exchanges.

This communication from Colonel Skinner came most opportunely, as it threw light on the habits and characteristics of the bird, which was much needed and sought for, but had not been supplied by any other source. The Colonel strongly advocates the liberal importation of the birds with a view of their domestication, and we most cheerfully second his proposition. Joint action of the clubs, which he proposes, could not but meet with success, and would be attained with small expense; and would, moreover, insure their more absolute protection. We hope our clubs will take action in the matter, for the subject is one well worthy of consideration, and cannot but pay handsomely for the outlay.

A communication signed Hallan, from an officer in the 10th Royal Bengal Fusiliers, temporarily in Chicago, fully endorses all that Colonel Skinner stated in his communication in our issue of April 26th.

But equally interesting and of much importance is a communication from the well-known Mark Byrd, of Austin, Texas, having reference to a specimen which he sent us, and which we have forwarded to Dr. Elliott Coues for his opinion, which we hope to receive by our next issue.

As a matter of information, any of our readers who desire can see a couple of live specimens of the European or migratory quail at Kaempfers, 127 Clark street, this city.

CINCINNATI, Ohio.

Permit me, my dear Rowe, to return to the charge again on the importation of the European quail, for there is no one thing connected with field sports in which I take so deep an interest.

What we reflect that we have not a single domesticated creature on this continent which is indigenous to the soil, and that the progenitors of all of them, including even the honey bee, were imported from abroad, we can see for a moment doubt the successful acclimation of so hardy and prolific a bird as the *coturnix vulgaris*, a bird so completely independent of climatic influences, as much as his power of flight enables him to select his own climate. I fancy that if you will use your journal, so deservedly potent with the sportsmen of the country, you may secure from the numerous clubs, both north and south of the Ohio and the Potomac, a joint action which will command success. A few

hundreds of birds turned down into the gulf states in the autumn, and as many in the northern states in the spring, will stock the country in an incredibly short time. The birds for the south can be taken in unlimited numbers on the north shore of the Mediterranean in the fall, when congregating for their flight into Africa, and for the northern states they can be secured in the same localities on their return flight in the spring.

I send you the following brief article, written for the Cincinnati *Times* last week, for which, for the sake of the object in view, I request a place in the *Chicago Field*:

"We concluded our article in last week's *Times* on the importation and acclimation of foreign game, with but brief mention of the migratory quail of the Eastern Hemisphere. As the acclimation of this desirable bird would prove the most valuable, as it is undoubtedly the easiest acquisition we could make, we thought it deserving a paper to itself.

"This bird is insectivorous in a high degree, and who can deny the great national benefit to be derived from the introduction into our country of an additional and powerful check to that insect life which is the bane and curse of our agriculture, both North and South? Why may not the plagues of the army worm and the grasshopper disappear before the myriads of quails, which a few years after their successful introduction, will sweep over the whole breadth of our continent, from Canada to Mexico, twice in each year?"

"Viewed as a check upon insect life, a well-organized effort to introduce the European quail should receive the active sympathy of the government, and we are satisfied that a portion of the fund at the disposal of the commissioner of agriculture would be well invested in such an undertaking. Now that we have a line of steamers direct from New York to Messina, and other ports on the Mediterranean, the importation of quails from Sicily offers no difficulties whatever. A word from the secretary of state to any of our consuls at these ports would secure their active co-operation in shipping the birds, which suffer but little from the confinement of the coop or voyage, and which may be purchased at the almost nominal price of \$10 per 100. "If the many sportsmen's clubs in the states between the Ohio river and the lakes would combine and subscribe but \$20 each they would secure a result compared with which all their landable efforts for the protection of game and promotion of fair, honest,

manly sport will sink into insignificance."

Ever yours truly,
F. G. SKINNER.

CHICAGO, Ill.

EDITOR CHICAGO FIELD:—Having read with interest the letter which appeared in the *Chicago Field* of the 26th ult., from Col. F. G. Skinner, on the subject of the migratory quail, and having been stationed at Malta for four years with my regiment, where I had ample opportunities for observing the habits of the birds in question, the result of a few of my observations may be of interest to your readers.

Malta, situated as it is, midway between the continents of Europe and Africa, is made use of by nearly all the European migrants, as a half way house or resting place of which they take advantage during their spring and autumnal flights. In the spring the quails arrive about the first week in April, their flight lasting till the middle of May. Many doubtless cross the Mediterranean without resting, provided the south winds continue favorable to their flight; in fact the time when quails are found to be most plentiful is when the south wind changes round to a reverse and therefore an adverse quarter to the flight of the migrants, thereby necessitating them to take refuge on the nearest land whither instinct directs them.

In autumn they cross the Mediterranean on their southern journey from about the middle of September to the end of October, taking advantage of the northerly winds which are prevalent at this period of the year. At this time they are found to be badly plumed and out of condition, both of which facts are doubtless due to long flights and the influence of a breeding season. At this time of the year they can be purchased in the Valletta Market at a shilling a dozen.

In Malta quails are hunted chiefly by means of a peculiar breed of pointer, known in the island under the name of "smell dogs." These dogs are trained both to point and retrieve and one that performs these dual duties satisfactorily often commands a high price. A badly broken dog will often devour the birds before there is time to effect a rescue. Netting is also resorted to in the capture of the migratory quail, as an ordinary cast net being used for the purpose. On the "smell dogs" pointing the Wary Joe (a cognomen by which all Maltese are known), throws his net over the dog and surrounding ground, thereby enveloping his game.

The migratory quail is particularly partial to the cotton seed, and I have seen them caught in Gozo (an island a few miles west of Malta), by means of a rod and line, to the hook on the end of which a cotton seed is attached. The sportsman (if so he may be termed), perches himself on a rock or embankment overlooking a field of wheat and allows the cotton seed to be carried by the wind over the grain; the unsuspecting quail rises to it, and is only too often safely landed on the bank above. The migratory quail lies very close, especially in a wind, and I have walked over the birds before they would rise. They do not fly far when flushed and if marked down can generally be found close to the spot at which they alighted. They will often take refuge in stone walls or debris, from which I have often taken them without the assistance of the gun.

The south wind which blew across Chicago this morning reminded me of the desert winds of the Mediterranean. May it in a few years hence, like the Siree, bring with it the migratory quail and afford to the sportsmen of the west a game bird, and to the Chicagoan gourmand a dainty which neither is likely to despise.

HALLAN.

AUSTIN, Texas.

EDITOR CHICAGO FIELD:—The very interesting and racy letter of our mutual friend, Colonel F. G. Skinner, in relation to the migratory quail in the *Chicago Field* of the 26th ult., served to remind me of a line that I had promised to write as to the *Masena quail*. He is known as *Cyrtosia Masena*, *Ortyz Masena*, *Ortyz Montezumae*; *Odontophorus*; *Meleagris*, *Tetra*, *Guttata* and *Perdix Perspicillata*. So you see he has nearly as many names as a Pasha has tails, or a chevalier *D'Industria* has aliases, or a cat has lives, or a Turk wives.

This bird is insectivorous in a high degree, and who can deny the great national benefit to be derived from the introduction into our country of an additional and powerful check to that insect life which is the bane and curse of our agriculture, both North and South? Why may not the plagues of the army worm and the grasshopper disappear before the myriads of quails, which a few years after their successful introduction, will sweep over the whole breadth of our continent, from Canada to Mexico, twice in each year?"

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CHICAGO, Ill.

Brewer and Ridgway. It the first mentioned will be found the best painting of the bird, and in the next the best description. J. H. Clark, quoted by Dr. Coues, says he found the bird in the neighborhood of San Antonio. "Neighborhood" is an indefinite term, he may mean ten or one hundred miles of that venerable city; I think he meant the latter. Dresser, who is quoted by Prof. Baird, says—1868 he met it in Banderia country, eighty miles west of San Antonio. The specimen I send from Mason is found further north of San Antonio than Dresser saw it, Mason county being about one hundred miles north of San Antonio, and in latitude 31°. I have also a specimen before me painted in water colors in 1888 by Mrs. Gen. Sidney Johnson; this last one was taken in Llano county. Major Mabry tells me that the bird lies well to a dog, and affords good sport.

MARK BYRD.

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